



On Balance

Message from the Director



Marla S. Moore

More than six months have passed since I came to the AOC as director. During these times of challenge and change, I have made it my goal to help chart a new course for judicial administration in Georgia. While I am mindful of the strengths and weaknesses of the agency's past, I have in mind a more cooperative

future for all the groups and agencies that make up the judicial branch.

I believe the present moment is too dangerous to waste our energy, our resources and our political capital engaged in turf battles within the court system. We can best serve the people of Georgia by working together for system improvements—if not in agreement, at least in an atmosphere of mutual respect and candid communication. My goal as director is to begin to build trust, to open avenues of communication, and to establish standards of professionalism at the AOC that can be relied upon to foster cooperation.

During the 2010 legislative session, the AOC has hosted a weekly meeting of key staff members for the judges' councils, appellate courts and lobbyists from the State Bar and other groups to share information. My hope is that this group will mark a new beginning in working together to present a united front for the issues facing the judicial branch. In the past our public disagreements have done little to enhance our prestige with the Governor and members of the General Assembly. The AOC's legislative agenda is to promote a judiciary united by its determination to meet the challenges of these tight budgetary times.

A more cooperative future for the judicial branch must be nourished and actively cultivated. I ask for your support, patience and commitment to help this effort take root and flourish.

State of the Judiciary Notes

Submitted by Crystal Johnson

On March 16, 2010 Chief Justice Carol Hunstein gave her first state of the judiciary before a joint session of the state Legislature.

Chief Justice Hunstein addressed the audience with a view to lifting the figurative "veil" that can sometimes obscure the functions of the Judiciary from those it serves. Justice Hunstein provided an insightful review on the vital duties of Georgia's five classes of courts. The mission of the Judiciary to impartially interpret the laws of the United States and the State of Georgia, and its functions are critical to the public well being. The Judicial Council, along with agencies like the AOC, provides essential support to Georgia's judicial system.

Though the entire nation is feeling the effects of the economy, the impact on Georgia's judicial system is particularly severe. Shortfalls are receiving national attention as even the media acknowledges that the "wheels of justice are turning more slowly" in Georgia. Tragically, those hardest hit are the state's most vulnerable.

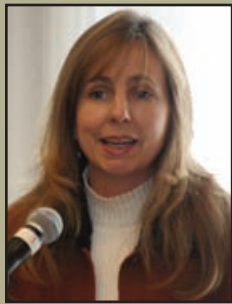
Though Georgia's judiciary is a significant source of revenue for the state, with a Supreme Court recognized as the most productive in the country and DUI and Drug Courts that provide a model for the rest of the country, Chief Justice Hunstein revealed that in 2009 the judicial branch received less than eight-tenths of 1 percent of total state appropriations. This in the face of increasing case-loads and state needs.

Georgia's courts have shared the burden of state budget cuts with critical staff being laid-off, Judges voluntarily taking furlough days, law libraries closing and even one County's court having to close a day each month. Georgia is faced with the threat of criminal prosecutions being halted, child support and child custody issues left undecided and business disputes left unresolved.

At this moment, the judiciary faces a crossroads as budget reductions make it increasingly difficult to function and to meet constitutionally mandated obligations.

Cold Case Project Fellows Recognized by J4C

Submitted by Michelle Barclay



Michelle Barclay

On Friday March 26, 2010 the AOC and Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children (J4C) staff recognized the eleven Fellows who worked on the Cold Case Project. This year long project, launched April 1, 2009, reviewed 214 children's foster care cases in 45 Georgia counties. Using a statistically predictive model, the project focused on children who have been in foster care for at least 2 years and who appeared to be aging out of foster care without attaining permanency. The purpose of the project was to make sure that all the proper legal requirements were met for these children's cases, to see if all permanency options had been explored and to prepare for the upcoming federal Child and Family Services Review.

The Cold Case Project was sponsored by the Committee on Justice for Children in full partnership and support with the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services and the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate. The Cold Case Fellows were: Patricia Ketch Buonodono; Melinda Cowan; Rachel Davidson; Darice Good; Karlise Y. Grier; Diana Rugh Johnson; Tr  n Lankford; Dorothy Murphy; Brooke Silverthorn; Leslie Stewart; and Ashley Willcott. Additionally, Robert

Grayson and Tammy Griner who serve as Special Assistant Attorneys General were Senior Fellows to the Cold Case Project and provided technical assistance.

The Fellows themselves represent a mix of agency (Special Assistant Attorneys General), parent, and child attorneys. Ashley Willcott, a Special Assistant Attorney General, is the Cold Case Project's leader. The Fellows have made periodic presentations at the Committee on Justice for Children meetings and at training opportunities around the state about their work. A paper about the work is currently being written and will be published by the J4C Committee. Applied Research

Services (ARS), an Atlanta based company specializing in criminal justice and policy development, is the project evaluator. Already, many areas of needed improvement have been identified: including uniform relative search documentation; better documentation of "compelling reasons" (a required evidentiary finding for some cases);

and more documentation of the child's true engagement of his/her permanency plan among others.

At a lunch for the Fellows, they were presented with a certificate signed by Supreme Court Justice Harris Hines, Chairman of the Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children. Millicent Houston, representing the Division of Family and Children Services, was present as was Beth Locker from Voices for Georgia's Children, Tammy Meredith from ARS in addition to AOC staff.

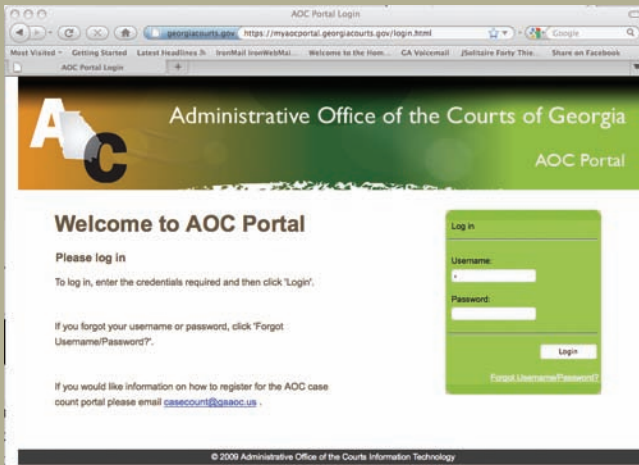


Cold Case Fellows and staff at the March 26 meeting.

New Caseload Reporting Tool

Submitted by Kevin Tolmich and Justin Brady

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is constantly developing new and innovative products and services to help the courts. The latest product is called the AOC Portal. Each year trial courts are contacted to provide certain case information filed in their courts



<https://myaocportal.georgiacourts.gov/login.html>

during the previous calendar year. The process of gathering this information involves a great deal of time and expense for both the clerks and the AOC. AOC Division of Planning and Research sees first hand the large amount of time, effort and expenses (paper, postage, etc.) it takes the courts in supplying the AOC with caseload data. Getting accurate and timely data submissions is critical for caseload analysis and studies

related to the advancement of the judiciary in Georgia. The Judicial Council and AOC use the provided caseload data in the development of new judicial policies, to support or oppose proposed legislation, and efforts to obtain additional judicial resources such as the superior court judges. The Portal was developed ease the burden of courts while still allowing the AOC to obtain the needed data.

The Division of Planning and Research worked closely with the IT Division to create a more economical and efficient solution for gathering and validating data that is submitted by creating a special AOC website on the Internet. The Portal is a tool that allows the courts to submit annual caseload totals on-line. So now, there is no need for the courts to mail or fax caseload forms and reports. The Portal is a secured website that enables assigned court personnel to submit and review caseload totals. The security will allow only designated individuals to see their own court's information. In addition, the Portal can also be used to update the contact information for the court. This includes job titles, mailing addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers for judges, clerks and other court staff.

If you are interested in using the Portal, please contact Justin Brady AOC Planning and Research, 404-463-6298 or justin.brady@gaaoc.us

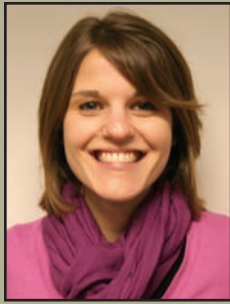
Research Team Meeting

No need for conference rooms, here. Data Analysts Berneatha Hollingsworth, Jennifer Moore, and Pamela Dixon met with Justin Brady, Research & Statistical Associate, in an informal hallway meeting to discuss upcoming projects.



Dublin Judicial Circuit *Color of Justice* Program

Submitted by Tracy Powell



Tracy Powell

On Saturday, February 20, 2010, the Committee on Access and Fairness in the Courts held the Color of Justice program in the Dublin Judicial Circuit. The program was held at the Laurens County Courthouse, and was hosted by Chief Judge H. Gibbs Flanders (Superior Court, Dublin Judicial Circuit). A total of 35 students from Laurens and Treutlen counties, and city of Dublin schools, participated in the half day program.

The Color of Justice Program, created by the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), is designed to introduce students in middle and high school to the many career options available within the legal and law-related professions. Through panel discussions and one-on-one conversations, judges, lawyers, law students, and court administrators share their personal stories and professional experiences with program participants. While the program targets female and minority students, an opportunity for participation is extended to the broader population of students. Since 2006, the Program has been hosted at sites including Fannin, Chatham, Fulton, Dougherty, and DeKalb counties.

The program was organized into three segments – morning panel rotation, luncheon, afternoon panel rotation – bookended by short opening and closing sessions. During the opening session, Judge Flanders delivered introductory remarks and welcomed the students and other attendees. Judge Tammy Stokes (Recorder's Court of Chatham County), as a representative of the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), followed, giving a brief history of NAWJ and

the program's success in Chatham County in 2008. As a representative of the Committee on Access and Fairness in the Courts, Judge James F. Bass, Jr. (Superior Court, Eastern Judicial Circuit) spoke to the program's goals and merits and encouraged all students to enjoy their experience. Throughout the day, students rotated between the four panels to interact with judges, attorneys, law students, and court administrators. These panels focused on the preparation, commitment, and hard work required in college, law school, and work careers within the legal profession. Panelists shared their personal stories and professional experiences. Categorized under the title "Law as a Career:

Preparing the Way" were the attorney and law student panels, with the judges and court administrators under the heading "The Color of Justice: Making a Difference." Students asked varied questions of the panelists, and some evaluations even reflected wishes for more time at each panel. The luncheon, an opportunity for more one-on-one conversations between the students and panelists, was held in the Laurens County Commission building after the conclusion of the morning sessions. The discussion was animated throughout the hour-long gathering. The Rotary Club of Dublin, Georgia, generously sponsored the luncheon as part of its commitment to local youth education.

The Dublin Judicial Circuit was overwhelmingly represented in the group of panelists, which achieved the goal of creating an event that was very local and community-oriented. The entire attorney panel consisted of attorneys from the District Attorney's office, as well as several in private practice. The Clerk of

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Judge H. Gibbs Flanders, standing, welcomes students, panelists, and staff to the Dublin Judicial Circuit Color of Justice Program.

Superior Court, the Victim-Witness Assistance Director, Judicial Staff Attorney, and a local Court Reporter sat on the Court Administrators panel. Along with Chief Judge Flanders, Judge Stanley Smith (Superior Court, Dublin Judicial Circuit) sat on the judge's panel. District Attorney Craig Fraser attended the opening session, and delivered some encouraging remarks for the students to consider as they met with the various panels. Local attorneys volunteered as Group Leaders to escort each group of students throughout the day. This added to great sense of community already created by the number of panelists local to the area.

The student evaluations overwhelmingly rated the program either a 4 or a 5 (on a scale of 1-5). Students valued the opportunity to talk with judges and attorneys, and were interested to learn about how the justice system works and how courts operate. Illustrating the value of the opportunity to meet in a small group setting with the panelists, one student commented "when we asked a question we got

an honest answer." Students finished the program feeling inspired and motivated to achieve their goals, many sharing on their evaluations that they will think more seriously about going to law school and pursuing careers in this field. In addition, all panelists shared very positive reviews about their experience participating in the program.



Members of the Court Administrator panel discuss the roles that they play in the judicial system during the Saturday event in Dublin.

A dedicated group of AOC staff helped make this event possible. LaShawn Murphy, Patricia Gavel, Jill Radwin and Ashley Stollar contributed to all phases of the program, from pre-planning to post-program wrap-up. LaShawn, Patricia, and Jill each served as a moderator to individual panels, Ashley was on hand to take photographs, and Chris

Patterson represented the AOC on the panel of Court Administrators. The judges and court staff were happy to work with representatives of the AOC, and we were able to provide information about the mission and work of the agency.

AOC Contact List

Can't find the sticky note with Chris Patterson's phone number on it? Really need to e-mail Randy Dennis to check on something? Can't remember if you talked to Ashley Garner or Ashley Stollar (see pic at right), but you're pretty sure it was the one that works with CMPAC and not that pesky one with the camera?

Our website (www.georgiacourts.gov/contactus) features a dynamic contact list that will get you connected with whomever you need to speak to within the Administrative Office of the Courts. The alphabetical list features the name, title, department, e-mail address, and phone number for each AOC employee. It is updated regularly to reflect personnel and contact changes.



Ashley Garner, in yellow and black, works for CMPAC; Ashley Stollar, in black and yellow, is the pesky photographer.

Elder Law Training Initiative

Submitted by Tracy Powell

On Thursday, June 10, the Equal Justice Commission (consisting of the Committee on Access and Fairness in the Courts and the Committee on Civil Justice), with the Institute for Continuing Legal Education, will host a training seminar for volunteer attorneys in the subject area of Elder Law. Through data collected as part of the 2007/2008 Georgia Legal Needs Study and from the Georgia Senior Legal Hotline (a project of Atlanta Legal Aid Society), it is clear Georgia's seniors face many barriers to access to the courts, especially in regards to consumer, kinship care and benefits, and probate issues.

The focus of the program will be training on these issues with the intent to provide first-line assistance for more simple cases. The volunteer attorneys will work with the supervision and assistance of Georgia Legal Services Program and Atlanta Legal Aid Society. Attendees will be asked to fill out a full profile, including which county/counties they are willing to volunteer; this information will be maintained by the two legal services providers, who will refer cases to each attorney based on subject area and location. As the training will be focused on garnering support for pro bono representation, there will be no cost for registration, but the attendees will be asked to pledge to take on a minimum of two pro bono cases within the next year.

The program will consist of six hours of Continuing Legal Education, including one credit hour of professionalism, and will include sessions on: the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, simple contract law, the probate process, advanced directives and power of attorney, heir property, and common kinship care issues. The professionalism hour will address the importance of pro bono representation and employing professionalism when working with seniors. Attendees will also hear a presentation on the collaboration among Georgia's Aging Network. Speakers will include judges, private attorneys, and representatives from Georgia Legal Services Program, Atlanta Legal Aid Society, and

Georgia Appleseed.

While attendance at the Mercer location on June 10 will be limited to only 80 participants, a second seminar will be held on Friday, June 25 at the Gilmer County Courthouse. The same agenda will be taught at this location, and six Continuing Legal Education credits will also be available. At this north Georgia location, attendance will be limited to only thirty persons. Since attendance will be limited at both locations, it is imperative that only those who pledge to take at least two pro bono cases during the upcoming year attend.

The long term goal of this initiative (dependent on the identification of a funding source) is to establish Senior Legal Centers around the state that seniors could access to seek first line assistance. In courts where a Family Law Information Center is already established, the senior legal center may be attached or combined. In the meantime, the June 10 training will provide a solid foundation to bring the focus to this area of need and, hopefully, increase the number of attorneys in Georgia willing to volunteer their time to assist our senior citizens.

Providing First Line Legal Assistance to Seniors Through Pro Bono Representation – Attorney Training Seminar

Thursday, June 10, 2010 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Mercer University Walter F. Georgia School of Law
Contact: Jill Radwin jill.radwin@gaaoc.us
Tracy Powell tracy.powell@gaaoc.us

Providing First Line Legal Assistance to Seniors Through Pro Bono Representation—Attorney Training Seminar

Friday, June 25, 2010 9:00 am – 4:00pm
Gilmer County Courthouse
Contact: Jill Radwin jill.radwin@gaaoc.us
Tracy Powell tracy.powell@gaaoc.us

Day on the Bench: from the Gold Dome to the Courtroom

Submitted by Christopher Causey

The Day on the Bench program is designed to give legislators a first-hand experience of what a judge does and how courtrooms operate. The AOC and Cobb County State Court piloted the program in November 2009.

The Cobb County State Court Judges invited their legislative delegation to their courthouse to watch them in action.

The day started with a briefing of what to expect for the day from Judge David Darden. The packed agenda had legislators moving from courtroom to courtroom every 20 minutes to view a different judge and a different court calendar. Legislators visited every courtroom, they joined judges and other court personnel for lunch. During lunch judges entertained questions from legislators regarding court operations and discussed pressing legislative issues.

After lunch, the Sheriff's Office transported the legislators to the county jail to observe court hearings held at the jail. The event ended around 1:30 p.m. with many of the legislators lingering afterward to discuss the events of the day. Legislators left with a good

understanding of what happens in the courtroom, a relationship with judges they can build on, and an appreciation of the work performed by judges. Many of the legislators who participated in Cobb County

have talked to their colleagues about the program and what a great experience it was for them.

It is our hope that throughout this summer and fall many courts will participate in the



Day on the Cobb County Bench participants, including judges, legislators, and staff.

Day on the Bench program. The Administrative Office of the Court has created a how-to template which can be found on the website at

<http://w2.georgiacourts.org/legislatorportal/>

The Administrative Office of the Courts is also a valuable resource to assist in planning and implementation of the Day on the Bench Program.

For more information on the Day on the Bench Program, contact Christopher Causey at christopher.causey@gaoc.us

AOC Publishes Several Reports

The AOC has recently published several reports to www.georgiacourts.gov:

- **Annual Report: Georgia Courts FY 09:** Find valuable information about the structure of Georgia's judiciary, the work of the Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts initiatives, and caseload data for all classes of court.
- **Felony Docket Study:** a study to determine the com-

position of the felony docket objectively;

- **Alternative Dispute Resolution Study:** a study that compared the number of days from filing to disposition for selected cases assigned to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) with a similar number of cases assigned to traditional case management;
- **AOC Activity Summary:** How we made a difference in 2009.

Customer Surveys Gain Momentum in Georgia

Submitted by Christopher Patterson

A small but growing number of Georgia trial courts have traversed beyond traditional boundaries associated with the fair dispensation of justice, and have taken interest in assessing the customer experience. Perhaps it is part of a greater effort to operate courts that are more accessible, easier to understand and simpler to use; perhaps it is an approach to support budget requests or target resources in areas of concern to customers; or maybe it is to gauge how well court services stack up in an era of increased customer expectations. Perhaps it is because organizations of every stripe are soliciting feedback about products and support services; or maybe it can be attributed to a collective action plan to gain, build and restore public trust and confidence in judicial institutions. Perhaps it is a result of all these factors, but one thing is certain – courts stand to benefit from administering customer surveys for number of reasons.

Until recent years, court leaders have not had a practical, balanced and objective method for assessing customer satisfaction. With the advent of CourTools 1 – Access and Fairness survey, developed by the National Center for State Courts, the daunting challenge of evaluating certain aspects of service delivery was remedied. Straightforward and easy to use, the instrument gauges court user perceptions in areas of procedural fairness and access to court services. The survey is administered as an exit opinion poll directed at attorneys, litigants, jurors and visitors on a typical day of court. Court users are asked to take a few minutes to complete the survey while the experience is fresh in their mind. Opinions are expressed by responding to 15 statements using a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” Participants are advised not to identify themselves so as to ensure anonymity; they are also assured participation will in no way impact the outcome of their business with the court.

With assistance from the AOC, an increasing number of judges have been willing to brave the experience of being judged by stakeholders. In February last year

AOC staff, working in collaboration with the Council of Municipal Court Judges, piloted the CourTools 1 survey at three municipal courts and one Recorder’s



AOC Staffers LaShawn Murphy and Yolanda Mashburn administer customer surveys at the DeKalb County Recorder’s Court.

court. Since that time, the questionnaire has been administered at nine other trial courts, including three municipal, two Recorder’s and seven probate courts. AOC Court Services personnel ensured survey participants were afforded a non-threatening environment within the court lobby area to judge how well service delivery met expectations. Later, staff from AOC’s Planning and Research Division provided assistance with data processing and statistical analysis. Within a few weeks staff delivered a final report to the requesting judge for internal use. Survey results are neither published for public inspection, nor utilized for cross-court comparison. The survey has also been administered at local courts without assistance from the agency.

According to the National Center for State Courts information derived from the customer survey can be useful to court leaders for several reasons. First, the results paint a realistic picture of public’s perception of how the court is performing, thereby allowing court leaders to validate or disprove service delivery assumptions. Second, the survey provides decision makers with

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Have you heard about the Board of Court Reporting of the Judicial Council of Georgia?

Submitted by Matthew Kloiber

Each year, the Board's staff process certificate renewals for certified court reporters and annual registrations for court reporting firms.

This year, the Board's staff processed over 70% of online renewal certificates and annual registrations before the April 1 deadline. There has been an increase of approximately 85% of court reporters and court reporting firm utilizing the online payment system since 2008.

The Board of Court Reporting encourages the members of the judiciary and all court personnel to verify the status of a court reporter or registered court reporting firm. You may

contact our office at 404-656-6422 or to view if a court reporter is suspended or a court reporting firm is inactive, please visit our website, www.georgiacourts.gov/agencies/bcr

Are you having a hard time locating your desk underneath all that paper? If so, I invite you to join the Board of Court Reporting in addition to other divisions within the Administrative Office of the Courts to convert paper documents into retrievable electronic files. The Board began its electronic conversion in January

2010. It is our goal to perform daily automated processes expeditiously, and efficiently. This has resulted in huge cost-savings to the daily operations of the Board.



A recent meeting of the Board of Court Reporting.

Customer Surveys Gain Momentum in Georgia cont.

a capacity to identify and focus on areas of greatest importance to constituent groups. Third, the survey communicates desired outcomes, and therefore empowers court staff to devise creative means to achieve these outcomes. Fourth, hard data is an invaluable aide for preparing, justifying and presenting budgetary request, especially where personnel and technology enhancements are needed. Fifth, the survey permit courts to take lead in identifying primary responsibilities for which they can and should be held responsible. Sixth, the assessment serves as means for courts to demonstrate the value of services delivered. Finally, survey results establish a baseline from which the local court can chart progress in addressing areas that have caused concern and frustration for court users.

In these difficult economic times, government entities at every level are being challenged to demonstrate efficacy and service value. Never has it been more important for courts to show themselves as user-friendly institutions. By conducting customer surveys, courts communicate an interest in improving services and achieving better outcomes from the viewpoint of court users. Additionally, the effort provides a tangible demonstration of accountability and improved business operations through measurement. All of this is to underscore that the growing interest in customer surveys is well placed. Hopefully, the momentum gained will not dissipate, but will find customer surveys embraced as an accepted practice at courts throughout the state and beyond.